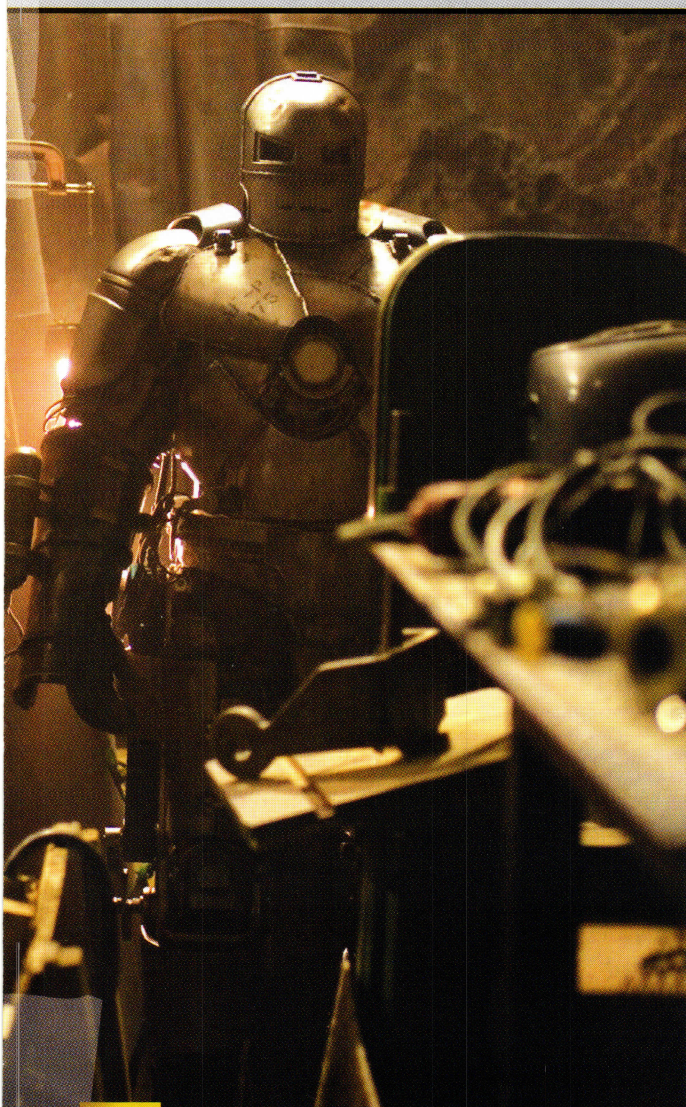


IRON AGE



In a year populated by movie superheroes, IRON MAN has proved to be one of the most popular to date. Like Christopher Nolan's reinvention of the Batman legend, Jon Favreau's affable superhero movie ranks as one of the finest and most successful examples of translating a comic book character to the screen – an achievement that's largely due to the contribution of leading man Robert Downey Jr.



Iron Man first appeared in the Marvel Comic Tales of Suspense in 1963, as created by Stan Lee, Larry Lieber, Don Heck and Jack Kirby, with Howard Hughes providing the inspiration for billionaire arms dealer and weapons designer Tony Stark.

"He was an inventor and adventurer, a multi-millionaire, a ladies man and, finally, a nutcase," executive producer Stan Lee says of Hughes. "What triggered me to create a character like Iron Man was that I wanted to do something different than the usual superhero. In 1963, Iron Man was all the things that young readers in those days didn't really care for: he was an industrialist and created war machines. I thought to myself, I'm going to make these kids like him by making Tony Stark a rich, glamorous, handsome, interesting guy. I also gave him a weak heart so that he would have one thing about him that made him less than perfect and would also give the readers something to worry about. The response to the character was amazing, and, of all the Marvel characters, Iron Man received more fan mail from female readers than any other property. People of all ages connected to the human side of the character."

Iron Man's point of difference in the Marvel universe is that he is the only self-made superhero, whose strength, powers and abilities come from the suits created by the brilliant – and human – Tony Stark.

"Iron Man really connected to readers because he's not a mutant," notes producer Kevin Feige, "he wasn't transformed at a biological level and wasn't bitten by any sort of genetic insect. He simply is a man who has used his genius to build an armoured suit, which is essentially the greatest piece of human ingenuity ever invented."

Iron Man's comic book origins were rooted in the Vietnam War and were subsequently upgraded and redeveloped for the film to reflect new technologies and the political, social and economic landscape of the world today.

"What Stan Lee wrote as science fiction back in the 1960s is currently

modern science," says director Jon Favreau. "We have become so advanced in our technology that things you can buy in a drugstore now would have been the subject matter for a sci-fi film back in the days when Iron Man entered the Marvel Universe. Tony Stark was a larger than life character with a conflicted nature who finds his true purpose when he becomes Iron Man. We wanted to keep the basic origin story structure, but tweak it so that it reflected the present day.

"It's a real balancing act of infusing the film with a fresh vision while still staying true to the genre. I feel we made a solid film, one that will appeal to a broad audience as well as the comic book readers who grew up with the character."

One of those kids was actor Robert Downey Jr, for whom landing the role of Tony Stark was something of a dream come true.

"I'm an American. I love Marvel Comics and grew up reading Iron Man and Spider-Man," explains Downey Jr. "I have always been drawn to Iron Man because he had amazing ingenuity and intelligence. Superheroes are great, but superheroes who manufacture weapons and then build a suit of armour that they wear and can fly around in makes for the ultimate 'nerdgasm', he laughs. "He's someone who's conflicted for the right reasons, and who doesn't recognise his potential until he starts to live in accordance with a moral code; it's a great, time honoured theme."

Favreau notes that Downey Jr. was as eager to play the character as the filmmaker was to cast him, and that the decision was to go against type.

"He wasn't the most obvious choice from a studio's point of view," the director explains, "but Marvel gave me the freedom to cast the best person for the role. In Marvel movies the superhero image is the big star and they've had a lot of success in the past when they've hired people who were strong, interesting actors and relied on the name of the brand itself to be a rallying cry from a commercial standpoint. This allows you to attempt to make the best movie possible, and when Robert Downey Jr. came on board he became a true partner creatively.

"Robert really went the extra mile and trained heavily to make his body look the way it should to play a superhero," Favreau adds. "He took the role very seriously, not just in the physical sense, but also in his understanding of what made the character tick. He found a lot of his own life experience in this character and he had a firm understanding of the role and the film before we started shooting."

